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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 004737

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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: CONTROVERSY,
INDIFFERENCE, ISOLATED VIOLENCE

REF: A. AMMAN 4251

[B](#). AMMAN 4189

Classified By: PolCouns Doug Silliman, per Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Jordan's municipal elections concluded July 27 with little fanfare but some controversy. Despite the efforts of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) to seek delay, more than 80 percent of municipal councils held contested elections over the weekend. The IAF remained firm in its insistence that the voting was marred by instances of voter fraud and procedural irregularity, which the government characterized as an example of the IAF's predictable anti-government line. In two instances, election-related violence disrupted what were generally orderly and peaceful days of voting. A mediocre turn-out reflected public apathy for the new structure of the municipal councils system, which marries elected officials with technocratic appointees. End Summary.

Procedure, Process & Results

[1](#)2. (U) Prior to the polls, the IAF initiated a petition to postpone the elections so newly elected MPs could review the temporary Municipal Elections Law that authorizes the Cabinet to appoint up to 50 percent of municipal council members and all mayors (ref A). Despite this protest, the IAF participated in Amman municipality elections and boycotted the rest of the country. In Amman, four of its 11 candidates won seats (ref B). In 1999, the party secured five seats on the capital's city council.

[1](#)3. (U) Voter turn-out approached 58 percent in the 82 cities and town that held polls, officials announced July 28. Voter turn-out in tribal and rural areas was higher than in major cities. Analysts say the elections were characterized by the absence of political rivalry and the domination of tribalism in most districts. In a July 28 press conference, Minister of Municipal Affairs Abdul Razzaq Tbeishat announced that the highest turn-out of 81 percent was registered in Jerash Governorate, while the lowest participation was 28 percent in Zarqa.

[1](#)4. (U) 1,608 candidates competed for 402 seats in 82 municipal councils. Among the 46 women running in the 99 municipalities' elections, five won seats. 152 candidates in 17 districts won seats in uncontested elections. The approximately half of the remaining council members and all mayors will be appointed by the government and announced shortly. Officials will appoint a woman to each municipality in which women failed to win seats.

[1](#)5. (U) In Greater Amman, voting was extended for a second day in 13 out of the capital's 20 districts due to low turn-out. 96 candidates competed for 20 council seats, including a woman who withdrew. Around 46 percent of the capital's 306,418 voters participated. This turn-out trumped those of the previous two municipal elections in 1999 and 1995, when 41 percent and 35 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots, respectively.

Voice of Opposition

[1](#)6. (U) The IAF called July 28 for the government to scrap the results of the elections in Greater Amman, alleging that the electoral process had been tarnished by violations ranging from vote rigging to interference by security forces at polls to government efforts to change the composition of certain balloting committees prior to the elections. The opposition claimed that eligible voters with stamped family books could not locate their names in the voting rosters at polling stations. IAF Secretary-General Hamzeh Mansour told one paper a day earlier that "many voters voted more than once. Some voters went to the ballot box five times."

[1](#)7. (U) Regarding his party's decision to participate in Amman despite calls for review of the Municipal Election Law, Mansour stated, "we participated with 11 candidates because (Greater Amman's election law) -- since its endorsement -- stipulates appointing 50 percent of the council members in addition to the mayor. But applying this same system to the

other municipalities was newly introduced and has not been endorsed by Parliament." A sign of the IAF's displeasure with the electoral system, Mansour remarked July 28 that "citizens used to elect their candidates at a time when Jordan was under the British mandate... Now we are living in the third millennium, and the government still thinks that people are not qualified or equipped enough to elect all municipal council members." Mansour was quoted in the July 29 issue of the Jordanian daily, al-Arab al-Yawm, saying the IAF will provide documents proving the government rigged the Amman elections.

18. (U) GOJ officials insisted the electoral process was fair and transparent and invited all person with complaints to the employ the Jordanian judicial system for resolution. Meanwhile, the Petra News Agency reported July 27 that some citizens complained of not having their names correctly indicated on voters' lists. Others said their correct national numbers were not on the list, making them ineligible to vote. The government, for its part, accused the IAF of playing its usual game of attacking and undermining official policy, without hard evidence or thorough investigation.

Isolated Violence

19. (U) As in the June parliamentary elections, the municipal elections passed with minimal violence. The most serious case involved two injuries in a dispute between supporters of two rival candidates in the Southern Shouneh district of the Jordan Valley on July 26. Violence flared as supporters of the leading candidate started "teasing supporters of those who lost," according to Balqa Governor Thamer Fayez on July 27. Those accused of opening fire were in police custody for questioning, said Fayez in a press interview, while those wounded were in stable condition. Authorities deployed at the scene of the skirmish, while local deputies started tribal mediation efforts to reach a reconciliation between the two sides. On the same day, a car was reported damaged in the Jordan Valley community of Deir Allah -- an act also attributed to electoral disputes.

Public Opinion

110. (U) The Jordan Times informally gauged public opinion in its July 28 issue, finding that regardless of personal attitudes toward the new hybrid electoral system, obtaining governmental services remains more important than issues of political structure for ordinary citizens. Some opponents of the mixed council system fear that appointees will come from other areas, making them less qualified than elected members that know their constituency and can relate to citizens and their needs. Proponents, however, believe that communities do not need local notable citizens but educated people with sufficient expertise to ensure the best performance.

111. (U) Deputy Mayor of Amman Abdul Rahim Bigai told the press on July 28 that complaints of far-from-efficient public sector performance were "understandable" but linked the slow pace of development with a fast-increasing population growth rate in the capital. Both Tbeishat and Bigai expect municipal work to gain momentum after the elections, with Bigai promising a "package of services" to Greater Amman residents.

Comment

112. (C) While there are doubts about the new, hybrid municipal councils structure, the population is more interested in the delivery of services than in who delivers them. The IAF's opposition to the structure is perhaps less a function of the group's displeasure with the de-democratization of the country than it is a comment on its lack of broad-based, grass-roots support outside Amman.

113. (C) While there were probably procedural violations during two days of polling, like the parliamentary elections, we do not believe they were widespread enough to change the election results. As with the parliamentary elections, it was the legal basis of the municipal elections that steered the results toward the government, not the procedures themselves.

114. (C) Voter apathy, reflected in the 58 percent voter turn-out rate, and the much lower rates in major urban centers, derives in part from opposition to the hybrid council structure, weariness after the recent parliamentary elections, and a general feeling among Jordanians that, elected or appointed, council members will serve their own interests before those of their constituents. End Comment.
GNEHM